



# **Equatorial Guinea - the forgotten dictatorship**

**Forced labour and political murder  
in Central Africa**

**Suzanne Cronjé**

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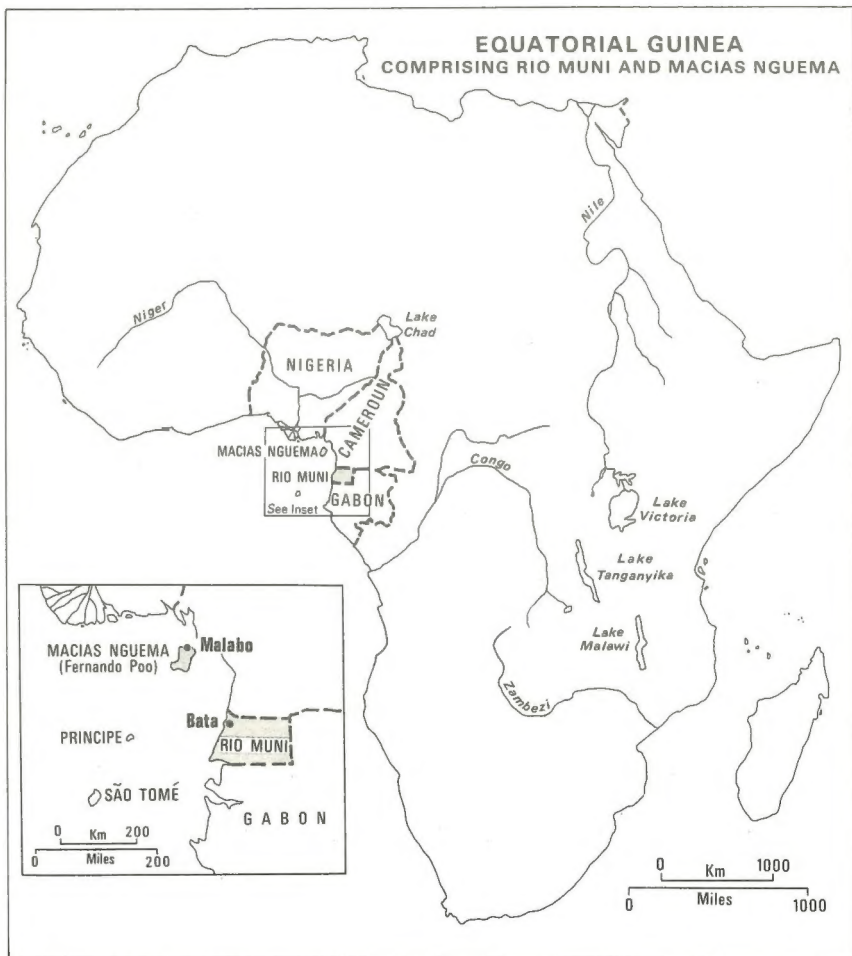
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# Introduction

Few people outside Africa have heard of Equatorial Guinea. Those who have, vaguely recall that some notoriety attaches to it, but they tend to confuse Equatorial Guinea with the Republic of Guinea, a former French colony which is also known as Guinea-Conakry, to differentiate it from its newly independent neighbour, Guinea-Bissau, until recently ruled by the Portuguese. Guinea-Conakry and Guinea-Bissau are on Africa's north-western shoulder, where the continent bulges into the Atlantic Ocean. Equatorial Guinea, as its name implies, is near the equator much further south, in the Gulf of Guinea.

The country consists of two parts: Rio Muni, an enclave on the African mainland some 10,040 square miles in area, and the island of Fernando Po, now renamed the island of Macias Nguema Biyogo after the President, which is some 785 square miles in extent. The total population in 1969 was 286,000, but as up to a quarter of the citizens are now said to be in exile the actual number of inhabitants at present may be considerably smaller. Cocoa has been the main cash export, but with political uncertainties and consequent economic mismanagement exports of this commodity have seriously fallen of late, and no other economic activity seems to have taken its place. At independence in 1968 the per capita gross national product was about \$260, not inconsiderable by African standards, but recently the World Bank noted a decline in GNP of 3.1 per cent over the period 1965-73. Communications with the outside world are so bad as to be almost non-existent: certainly the government has not been anxious to spread information about the state of affairs in this potentially prosperous country. Equatorial Guinea's main trading partner, Spain, connives at this silence about its former colony. In August 1976 the Spanish law making news about Equatorial Guinea classified material was extended for a further six months; the regulations cover all news reports, commentaries and dispatches which can be published by Spanish news media.

In August 1976 the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities decided, on grounds of gross and persistent violation of human rights, to examine conditions in Equatorial Guinea. The situation in that country which has given rise to this UN decision is examined in the following chapters.





# 1 History

## The Colonial Past

The obscurity which surrounds Equatorial Guinea is quite recent. Its island province off the West African coast, Fernando Po, was discovered by the Portuguese in 1472 and aptly named 'Formosa' — the beautiful. Three hundred years later Portugal exchanged the island with Spain for large tracts of land in South America, an important part of what is now Brazil. The treaties of San Ildefonso and El Pardo which sealed this transaction were signed in 1778, when the slave trade between West Africa, the West Indies and America was at its height.

In 1807 the Abolition Act outlawing slavery was passed in Britain, and ten years later Spain also prohibited slave trading (initially only north of the equator.) By then the Royal Navy was already engaged in regular patrols off the West African coast, and in 1827 Britain acquired from Spain the right to use Fernando Po as a forward naval base. As Spanish attempts to develop the island had failed, Britain's offer to administer it was welcomed in Madrid. As part of the patrolling operations, Britain used Fernando Po as a landing-place for rescued slaves, governing them and other Africans who drifted in, as well as the small indigenous population.

The naval establishment was discontinued in 1834, but Mr. John Beecroft, its superintendent, stayed on to administer the settlement, and in 1843 the Queen of Spain created him Governor of the island (without pay). Six years later the British government, to protect its growing trading interests in the region, decided to appoint Beecroft as the first Consul for the Bights of Biafra and Benin, an area which included the coast of what is now Nigeria, with headquarters in Fernando Po. Beecroft took up his consular duties towards the end of 1849, when direct British influence in Nigeria may be said to have begun. In 1851 Beecroft authorized a naval attack on Lagos, and the city was captured.

Its historical links with the slave trade have left a mark on Equatorial Guinea. For instance, some of the liberated slaves settled on Fernando Po; together with immigrants from the African mainland, chiefly from Liberia and Sierra Leone, they formed a small entrepreneurial élite whose members are now described as Fernandinos. One of these, a West Indian/Sierra Leonean by the name of William Pratt, noting the similarity between

Fernando Po's rich soil and that of the West Indies, sent to the West Indies for cocoa seeds and started planting cocoa in his new home. The experiment, which proved successful beyond anything William Pratt could have imagined, was to have fateful consequences for Equatorial Guinea's future.

In 1858 Madrid appointed the first Governor General for Fernando Po, and Spanish colonial rule started in earnest. Nevertheless, Spanish settlement was initially slow. The British Consuls for the Bight of Biafra remained stationed on the island until 1882, and British missionaries stayed even longer. It was only towards the end of the century that Spanish interest in Fernando Po became more active. There had been an increase in the world demand for cocoa, and the island's proven suitability for growing the crop attracted the attention of Spanish planters. Fernando Po is now said to provide the world's best cocoa.

The only limiting factor was labour. The indigenous population of a few thousand Bubis was too small and perhaps unwilling to man the Spanish plantations, and Spain looked for an alternative source of labour. The most promising was on the African mainland: Spain claimed the north-western corner of Gabon, a French possession, on the grounds that it had an older claim than France to the area, and that it needed workers for its Fernando Po plantations. [1] These arguments were accepted by the French government, and the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1900, ceded to Spain the territory which is now Rio Muni, together with the small offshore islands of Corisco, Elobey Grande, Elobey Chico, Mbanié and Cocotiers, as well as the larger island of Annobon (now known as Pagalù) which became part of Fernando Po province. The agreement acknowledged France's right of preemption in case Spain relinquished possession (but the islands Mbanié and Cocotiers were not mentioned in this connection), an interesting legal position, considering the dispute which sprang up in 1972 between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea over Mbanié and Cocotiers. (See below.) The preemption clause may also be relevant to the status of refugees from Equatorial Guinea who have crossed into Gabon.

Despite their urgent labour requirements the Spaniards at first concentrated their attention only on the coastal stretch of their newly won West African colony. The occupation of the interior of Rio Muni only started in 1926, with a Spanish expedition, and was only completed after World War II.

When Spain acquired Rio Muni in 1900 with the intention of turning the enclave into a labour reservoir, cocoa was already flourishing in the fertile soil of Fernando Po. The sparse population on the island had made it comparatively easy for the Spanish cocoa interests to acquire land. The local Bubi farmers were often persuaded to exchange their plots for less favourable ones to allow the Spaniards to amalgamate the farms into large plantations. In return the Spanish combines—the '*casas fuertes*' or big companies—often paid a small annual pension to the Bubis and sometimes provided scholarships

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1 Weinstein, Brian, *Gabon. Nation-Building on the Ogooué*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1966, p.212.



for their sons to obtain secondary or higher education in Spain. (A secondary school existed in Santa Isabel, but Africans stood little chance under colonial rule of being admitted). The patronage continued when the scholars returned home and relied on loans from the *casas fuertes* to establish themselves in their professions; others entered Spanish employment.

In Rio Muni the situation was different. Land was much less in demand and the Spaniards tended to concentrate on their original coastal settlements, where they obtained timber concessions. Coffee was produced, but mainly by small-holders, as was the mainland cocoa. At independence, 90 per cent of Equatorial Guinea's cocoa was produced in Fernando Po, most of it in some 50 modern plantations totalling about 50,000 hectares. The rest of the cocoa was grown in Rio Muni on some 10,000 hectares mostly in small family plots. The 250,000-strong mainland population, three-quarters of them Fang, therefore had no opportunity of being caught up in the Spanish patronage network. As a result the people of Rio Muni retained their independence. Being on the mainland, they were also far more open to the African nationalist influences which swept through the French, Belgian and British colonies after World War II. Colonialism had barely established itself in Rio Muni when the rest of Africa began to clamour for independence.

Rio Muni is located between Gabon and Cameroun, and the Fang, a fiercely independent and tradition-conscious ethnic group, had their heartland in the Woleu-Ntem province of Gabon which borders Rio Muni and Cameroun. Captain Cottés, a French official who was sent to delimit Gabon's northern border, and who explored the interior of Rio Muni in the early years of this century, believed France had made a mistake in ceding this territory to Spain because it was really a part of Woleu-Ntem, and Bata, Rio Muni's capital, could have served as a good port for Woleu-Ntem.<sup>[2]</sup>

Soon after Spain occupied the interior of Rio Muni the Fang in Cameroun started the *alar ayong* movement, an attempt to regroup the Fang clans and establish Fang nationhood. *Alar ayong* spread rapidly into Gabon and Rio Muni along traditional Fang trade routes. Worried about its political implications in Gabon, the French sent an experienced official to investigate it. His conclusions confirmed their worst fears: 'It is certain that once their regroupment is entirely finished, once the presidents of the *ayong* are all elected so that they will form a kind of government presided over by an elected official, then the Fang will present us with their organization as an entity capable of governing itself. It would be organized democratically and would arrive at the stage foreseen by article 75 of the Charter of the United Nations. . . which gives them the right to demand their independence'.<sup>[3]</sup>

Parallel developments went on among the Rio Muni Fang, though they remained officially unreported. The sense of Fang nationhood which developed in the thirties across international borders has become an important factor in the question concerning today's political refugees from Equatorial Guinea in Gabon and Cameroun.

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2 Cottés, A. La Guinée Espagnole, *Annales de Géographie*, Paris, 1909, pp.73, 86.

3 Weinstein, op.cit., pp 58-62.

In the early sixties the newly independent state of Gabon protested about the sufferings of the people of Rio Muni under Spanish rule, and it was said that Gabon's first president, Léon Mba, had given money to rescue some Fangs across the border. Many Equatorial Guineans claimed that Mba, a Fang, was born not in Gabon but inside their own country. In September 1962, at a parade in Libreville, capital of Gabon, to mark a meeting of leaders from the newly independent ex-colonies of France, a banner was carried appealing for the liberation of Equatorial Guinea, and Mba wrote: 'We demand the exclusion from the United Nations of impenitent racist countries; we shall ask that questions relating to Spanish Guinea, the island of Fernando Po, and all dependent territories be discussed'.<sup>[4]</sup> The September 1962 meeting in Libreville was presented with a memorandum which proclaimed the formation of a liberation committee for Spanish Guinea. The memorandum was submitted by Mr. Atanasio Ndongo, former gendarme in Libreville and, it was said, a relative by marriage of President Mba. In 1963, after Rio Muni and Fernando Po were granted internal autonomy by Spain, Ndongo, who pressed for full independence, founded one of Equatorial Guinea's main political parties, the Movimiento Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial—MONALIGE.

Gabon welcomed the granting of autonomy to Equatorial Guinea in 1963 and established friendly relations with the autonomous government's chief minister, Mr. Bonifacio Ondo Edu, also a Fang. When Ondo Edu visited Libreville in May 1965, he was given a warm reception: the Gabonese press even referred to him as 'President of Equatorial Guinea'.<sup>[5]</sup> (In 1964 he became leader of the right-wing Movimiento de Unión Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial—MUNGE. Ndongo and Ondo Edu were among Macias' first victims after independence in 1968).

Unlike President Mba of Gabon, the majority of Fang in Rio Muni, who had been infected with the more militant nationalism of *alar ayong*, were impatient with Spain's continued colonial presence and resented the autonomous government. In particular they resisted attempts to turn them into plantation labour, preferring to grow cocoa and coffee on their own small plots. The Spaniards preferred to believe that the Fang were unsuited for employment on 'civilized' estates, and this theory has survived to the present day: a 1973 UN report remarked that many of the Nigerian labourers who had returned home 'were not replaced because mainland workers lack training in the relatively sophisticated production methods of the island'.<sup>[6]</sup> Since Nigerian workers recruited for Fernando Po originated in the non-cocoa-producing areas of Nigeria and were equally unaccustomed to plantation work, this argument does not seem to hold water. Moreover, the workforce in the forestry sector of Equatorial Guinea, which is entirely in

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4 *ibid.* p.228.

5 *ibid.* p.229.

6 UNCTAD/UNDP, INT-27, March 1973, Project on Training and Advisory Services.



Rio Muni, consisted of 55 per cent of Nigerians in 1968. In this case there seems to have been even less reason why foreign labour should have been preferred to mainland workers drawn locally from the forest areas. The answer is that the Fang were not attracted by the low wages and poor working conditions in the plantations and forest concessions, and because of their resentment of colonial rule, those who could be persuaded to work for the Spanish owners proved troublesome employees. This attitude persisted after independence: material incentives did not improve, and to most people President Macias' dictatorship soon proved to be as bad as, if not worse than, that of the Spanish governors.

There was an additional reason why the Fangs were not used on the cocoa plantations before independence. The Spaniards did not want to import Fang nationalism into Fernando Po for obvious political reasons. By contrast with the mainland, nationalism was slow to take root on the island. An anti-imperialist movement, the Cruzada Nacional de Liberación formed in 1947, remained largely inactive. It consisted of Fernandinos and other marginal groups: the indigenous Bubi were too caught up in the Spanish patronage system to support agitation for an end to Spanish rule. In 1959, however, when the status of Equatorial Guinea changed from that of colony to 'provinces of Spain', the Cruzada joined in the protest and supported an appeal for independence, addressed to the UN by Micomeseng Enrique Nvo, leader of the Idea Popular de Guinea Ecuatorial (IPGE), a party which had been founded by the Fang in Rio Muni. Soon afterwards Nvo fled across the Cameroun border into exile, and later that year the Spanish police clamped down on nationalist leaders. There was not one Bubi among the eleven people arrested in this connection in Fernando Po.

Active Bubi participation started in 1960, with the return of Luis José Maho Sicacha, who had acquired a law degree in Spain with the help of a *casa fuerte* scholarship. Maho entered into a political alliance with the most important Bubi chief, Pastor Torao Sikara, but soon went into exile in Cameroun, as much because he had got into debt as for political reasons.

In Rio Muni the whites responded to the threat of African nationalism by organizing themselves into an armed militia; in Fernando Po it was simpler to buy the politicians. After autonomy in 1963 the more militant nationalists formed MONALIGE under the leadership of Atanasio Ndongo (see p.10); in reply the Spanish authorities, in conjunction with the *casas fuertes*, founded MUNGE under the leadership of Ondo Edu. René Pélissier, the leading expert on the political history of Equatorial Guinea, wrote about political life during that period: 'The game was not conducted by Africans but by colonial officials who had become provincials and who, through the medium of the financial interests with which certain of them were linked, conducted what seemed to be tortuous African politics, but was really obvious and logical: it was a matter of holding on to Fernando Po at any price in order to save the substantial profits which the government, through its preferential

cocoa prices, secured for them personally'. [7]

In the Governing Council of the first 'autonomous' government, elected in 1964, the Bubi, who formed only six per cent of the population, controlled four out of eight seats. As full independence became inevitable, Spanish interests encouraged Bubi nationalism as well as separatism in the hope of generating sufficient electoral support for the 'moderate' Bubi against the 'extremist' Fang. This would ensure continued Spanish influence on Fernando Po but, if the votes went the wrong way, the Bubi might be encouraged to try for secession. As a result a new party was formed in 1967, the Unión Bubi, led by Enrique Gori Molubela and Edmundo Bosio Dioco. It played on the fears of its Bubi supporters at being outnumbered by the mainlanders; it also increased Bubi reluctance to share the comparative prosperity of Fernando Po with the 'continental savages', as the Fang were now described by political propaganda.

Despite these intrigues the elections of September 1968 were won by Francisco Macias Nguema, a Fang who represented the radical wing of MONALIGE. One of his rivals, the chief minister in the autonomous government and leader of MUNGE, who had been Spain's first favourite, lost outright. Of the two other presidential candidates, Dioco became Vice-President and Atanasio Ndongo—leader of the more moderate MONALIGE wing—Foreign Minister. Enrique Gori Molubela was appointed a Provincial Councillor, and although Ondo Edu was not given office, two of his supporters, Antonio Ndongo and Mariano Mba, were appointed Deputy Presidents. The Bubi chief, Pastor Torao Sikara, also became Deputy President. This political compromise seems to have been forced on Macias by Spain. Although Fernando Po's indigenous population was only one fifteenth of the Equatorial Guinean total, a third of the new ministers came from Fernando Po. It seems that the constitutional settlement signed with Madrid guaranteed Fernando Po 12 parliamentary seats out of 35, as well as the vice-presidency, and a virtual veto over the allocation of government revenues. [8] This was the government with which Equatorial Guinea became independent in 1968.

The state in which 110 years of Spanish colonial rule left Equatorial Guinea at independence is well described in a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pamphlet published in August 1975 for United Nations personnel. [9] As it is intended to prepare staff members about to join the UNDP office in Malabo for the conditions they are likely to meet, it is a more accurate reflection of life in the country than that conveyed by other UNDP publications which are filled with jargon and statistics designed, one is tempted to suspect, to disguise the more unpleasant facets of Equatorial Guinea.

The UNDP pamphlet for the guidance of staff deals with local travel:

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7 Pélissier, R. Fernando Po ou la politique de l'insularité. *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, No.36, December 1968, p.84.

8 *Jeune Afrique*, Paris, Special Annuel, p.376.

9 UNDP/ADM/POST/EQG/Rev.3, 11 August 1975, Living Conditions in Equatorial Guinea.

'There is a limited network of paved roads both on the island and in Rio Muni. Most of the feeder roads are unpaved and in bad condition during the rainy season. There are no railways'. The local transport system—'not normally used by non-locals'—consists of 'a privately run taxi-bus system of low standard. Taxis are available when the local petrol situation permits'. Electricity is 'very expensive and the supply unreliable'. Experts are advised to bring with them 'a small supply of electric light bulbs, also batteries which are not as a rule available locally. Until recently butane gas cylinders were used for cooking purposes but supplies are no longer available'.

In Bata there is no central water supply, 'each house having to rely on its own supply, mostly wells'. In Malabo water is supplied 'but only during certain hours of the day in the dry season'. Medical facilities are no better: 'The number of physicians available is very limited. . . Only the simplest dental treatment can be obtained. . . Medicine and drugs are virtually unobtainable in local pharmacies'. Although bananas, lemons and papaya can be bought throughout the year,

all basic essential food-stuffs must be imported as no fresh or preserved meat, poultry, eggs, butter, cheese, rice, milk, flour is available. . . Apart from a limited range of Chinese-made cooking utensils and chinaware which are available from time to time, no household linen, crockery, glassware or appliances are on sale locally.

Much stress is put on health precautions:

Malaria, filariasis, infectious hepatitis, dysentery and whooping cough are endemic throughout Equatorial Guinea. Tuberculosis and parasitic intestinal diseases prevail. . . Garbage collection exists intermittently.

### Equatorial Guinea since Independence

The glaring neglect of Equatorial Guinea's infrastructure by Spain, Spanish interference in pre-independence politics, and the colonial introduction of forced labour into the plantations are undoubtedly at the root of much that has happened since independence in 1968. But although Spanish rule undoubtedly set a particularly brutal example of undemocratic government, Spain itself is not directly responsible for the reign of terror, documented in the next chapter, by which President Macias runs the country. The political framework for administering Equatorial Guinea built up since 1968 defies all international standards of human rights and the rule of law.

In 1970, following an alleged plot to overthrow him in 1969, Macias outlawed all existing political parties and decreed the formation of a single party, the Partido Unico Nacional, PUN, which later became the Partido Unico Nacional de Trabajadores, PUNT.<sup>[10]</sup> At the same time PUNT's youth wing—Juventud en Marcha con Macias—was created as a para-military force, grouping party members between the ages of 7 and 30 years.<sup>[11]</sup> This was followed on 7 May 1971 by Decree 415/71 which 'regularized' the situation by repealing certain articles of the constitution.<sup>[12]</sup> The president thereby

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10 PUNT, estatutos, Santa Isabel, 1970.

11 *ibid.* Chapter IV.

12 *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, Numero Extraordinario, 7.5.1971.



assumed the powers of the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, as well as the prerogatives of the Council of the Republic. A few months later, on 18 October 1971, law 1/1971 established penalties, including capital punishment, for offences against the president, his government and the territorial integrity of Equatorial Guinea.

The next landmark in Macias' drive for absolute personal power was reached on 14 July 1972 when decree 1/72 proclaimed him President for Life, Head of the Nation and the Party, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Grand Master of Education, Science and Culture.<sup>[13]</sup> The independence constitution of 1968, which had already been mutilated, was finally abolished and a new constitution presented to the Third Congress of PUNT in July 1973, approved by PUNT and ratified by a referendum organized by PUNT. The new constitution contained a clause requiring election of the president by direct secret universal suffrage<sup>[14]</sup> but as the Third Congress proclaimed Macias President for Life, this clause was immediately suspended. Under the new constitution Macias obtained the right to dissolve the assembly and call fresh elections; he is also empowered to nominate and dismiss all judges. According to Article 31 no one can be detained or sentenced except by a competent authority under laws in force at the time of the offence and subject to procedures established by the law. However, Article 32 makes it clear that these safeguards do not apply to persons accused of offences against the security of the state or subversion.

President Macias has made his impact felt in other ways as well. The UNDP pamphlet mentioned above, commenting on housing for United Nations personnel in Fernando Po, states:

The accommodation problem at Malabo has been aggravated by the fact that the larger part of the residential area of the city has been incorporated in the Presidential Zone, which is closed to the public.

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13 *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 14.7.1972.

14 La Nueva Constitución para La Rep. de Guinea Ecuatorial

## 2 Repression

*Violence and repression have a long history in Equatorial Guinea, owing much to the nature of Spanish colonial rule. But since independence in 1968, and especially since President Macias' assumption of increasing personal power since 1970, legalised oppression and political murder have become commonplace instruments of government policy.*

### Forced labour

Forced labour started early in the period of Spanish colonial rule. Chapter 1 described how a shortage of men to work Spanish cocoa plantations on Fernando Po in the 19th century led to Spanish acquisition of the mainland territory of Rio Muni. But the Fernando Po plantation owners preferred to rely on the workers they had imported from other West African countries, particularly Liberia, ever since Spanish colonial rule on the island started. These labourers, mainly Liberian Kru—normally known as Krumen—had long worked as dockers, porters and sailors for West African shipping; from the middle of last century they hired themselves out to the Spaniards in Fernando Po. Sir Richard Burton, the explorer, who was Consul for the Bight of Biafra in 1861-1864, wrote that 'Nanny Po' was a word of fear to the Krumen; they had been made to work in gardens and on the roads and they complained—mostly falsely, I afterwards found—of *puoco comer mucho trabajo* [little food, much work]. Some of them had been engaged for one year, not two, and had been kept for three—the usual time to great sorrow of their mammies and to the abiding resentment of themselves.' [15]

Whatever Burton thought of the Kru complaints, it is clear that the Krumen were kept against their wishes to work on the island for longer periods than they had engaged themselves for. Compulsion started early in Equatorial Guinea. Moreover, working conditions seem to have been exceptionally bad, even by colonial standards; towards the end of the century Liberian workers in Fernando Po contracted tuberculosis and venereal disease, which they afterwards spread through Liberia. [16]

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15 Burton, R.F. *Wanderings in West Africa*. London, 1863. Quoted in West, R. *Back to Africa*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, p.302.

16 West, R. *Back to Africa*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970 p.302.

The practice of importing Kru labourers for the cocoa plantations continued into this century. Richard West described in his recent book<sup>[17]</sup> how the system worked:

Liberians, acting as Spanish Consuls, recruited the labourers and took a commission for each man hired. When the labourers returned from Fernando Po they would hand the consul a voucher for the balance of their wages. Dishonest consuls, as many undoubtedly were, would steal part or all of this money on fabricated pretexts. . . In 1923, under pressure from the American economic adviser, the Liberian government banned the recruitment of boys for Fernando Po. The trade was resumed after the Spanish Consul had 'fixed' the Liberian legislature for the moderate price of £150.

International concern about this situation started therefore in the early 1920s; the Spanish fears that the Liberian source of manpower might dry up probably led to the decision in 1926 to occupy the interior of Rio Muni which had, after all, been claimed by Madrid as a recruiting ground of labour for Fernando Po. An international scandal broke after Liberia's presidential election in 1927, when the defeated candidate, Thomas J. Faulkner, an American negro, returned to the United States to denounce the Liberian government for electoral malpractices. Among the accusations he made was that Liberian ministers were responsible for forced labour, amounting almost to slavery, that they kidnapped young men for forced labour in Fernando Po, and that they refused to investigate charges of brutality.<sup>[18]</sup>

President C.B.D. King of Liberia denied the allegations and asked the League of Nations to send a commission to investigate the accusations. The League appointed a three-man commission consisting of a Scotsman, a black American and a former Liberian president, which reported in 1930 that

a large proportion of the contract labourers shipped to Fernando Po and French Gabon from the southern counties of Liberia have been recruited under conditions of criminal compulsion scarcely distinguishable from slave raiding and slave trading, and frequently by misrepresenting the destination.<sup>[19]</sup>

However, the report found the Liberian government innocent of most of the other charges. Soon afterwards President King resigned, although he had not been personally criticized. The flow of Liberian labourers into Fernando Po dwindled.

The Spanish authorities in Equatorial Guinea then turned to Nigeria for their labour needs, particularly the over-populated east of the country where young people were accustomed to migrate in search of work opportunities. This soon gave rise to Nigerian complaints that illegal recruitment to the island had occasioned direct slavery, and a labour law to control recruitment from Nigeria was passed in 1929 by the British colonial authorities. In 1942 a formal agreement was signed between the Spanish government and the British colonial administration, but dissatisfaction continued both with the level of wages and the recruitment conditions. Revisions of the agreement in 1952, 1956 and 1962 did little to alleviate the dissatisfaction of the

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17 West, *op.cit.*

18 *ibid.* p.303

19 League of Nations Document C.568M.272. Commission's Report. Geneva, 1930.

Nigerian workforce. Between 1970 and 1971, 95 Nigerians were killed in Fernando Po for demanding the arrears of their wages.<sup>[20]</sup> In 1971 the signing of the labour agreement was delayed until May, a factor which led the IMF in Washington to note that the prospects for Equatorial Guinea's 1971/72 cocoa harvest were 'hardly encouraging'.<sup>[21]</sup> The statistics in the report show that cocoa was responsible for 66 per cent in value of Equatorial Guinea's export earnings in 1970.<sup>[22]</sup> The IMF report observed that Equatorial Guinea's future prospects

seem to depend on the solution of problems relating to the maintenance and expansion of domestic production. For the moment this question is closely linked to the continued availability of supervisory personnel and contractual workers from Nigeria. . . . Partial substitution of local workers has apparently not permitted a satisfactory solution of this problem.<sup>[23]</sup>

In 1972 20,000 Nigerians left Fernando Po, but that year the Nigerian government signed an agreement with Equatorial Guinea for the recruitment of a further 15,000.<sup>[24]</sup> The treaty came up for renewal in 1974, but visits by a Nigerian delegation to discuss its renewal were postponed several times because of the persistent reports of ill-treatment of workers. Finally the Nigerian government suspended the recruitment of workers, but clandestine recruitment continued.<sup>[25]</sup>

Towards the end of 1975 there were fresh allegations of brutality, and things came to a head when members of Nigeria's embassy staff were ill-treated.<sup>[26]</sup> The Nigerian government decided to evacuate its nationals: 10,000 were flown home in December, and many thousands more were brought home by ship. During the evacuation eleven Nigerians were killed in an attack on the embassy at Malabo and there were other reports of brutality. For instance, locally-born wives of the workers were not allowed to accompany their husbands to Nigeria,<sup>[27]</sup> and in the general panic at the docks the militia opened fire on the returnees.<sup>[28]</sup> Nigeria's state-controlled radio commented:

The clear indications are that the authorities either encouraged these primitive acts or condoned them. This situation is hardly any surprise. Equatorial Guinea has built up an unenviable reputation as one of the countries where respect for human rights is rare.<sup>[29]</sup>

A federal government statement said that the incidents were 'the worst to date in the unbroken chain of provocation and humiliation meted out to

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20 *Sunday Times*, London, 1.2.1976.

21 International Monetary Fund, *Etudes Generales sur les Economies Africaines*, Washington, 1973, p.326.

22 *ibid.* p.351.

23 *ibid.* p.326.

24 *Africa*, London, March 1976, p.57.

25 *West Africa*, London, 26.1.1976, p.99.

26 *ibid.* p.121. also *Sunday Times*, 1.2.1976.

27 *West Africa*, 2.2.1976, p.153.

28 *Africa*, March 1976, p.37.

29 BBC Monitor Report SWB ME/5111/B/1, Lagos, English for abroad, 15.30 GMT, 17.1.1976.



Nigerians in Equatorial Guinea'; it had stepped up the evacuation of the labourers in protest against the 'barbaric treatment' meted out to them 'not only by their employers but also by agents of the country's government'; and it regretted that 'the diplomatic pressures which have been applied in the past have been insufficient'. [30]

At the end of January 1976 Nigeria's Federal Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr. B.O. Mafeni, said that 25,000 of the estimated 45,000 treaty labourers on the island had been evacuated.<sup>[31]</sup> Exact statistics are hard to come by in Equatorial Guinea, but according to most estimates the island's population consists of about 15,000 indigenous Bubis, 3,000 Fernandinos and a few thousand Fangs from the mainland. The Nigerians were previously by far the largest population group. After their exodus it was reported that the markets on the island looked desolate and deserted.

In view of Equatorial Guinea's dependence on Nigerian labour for the cultivation of cocoa, the main export and foreign currency earner, and the IMF's comment that the use of local labour had been unsatisfactory, it is hardly surprising that the departure of the Nigerians was followed by reports that 'more than 20,000 people are being pressed into slavery to work on cocoa plantations in Equatorial Guinea'. The report quoted Equatorial Guinean refugees in Madrid:

They claim that President Macias Nguema had ordered his guards to arrest between 2,000 and 2,500 people in each of the ten districts of the mainland province of Rio Muni, to be used as unpaid forced labour on the plantations on the island of Macias Nguema, named after the 'lifetime' President. The order was reportedly issued about two weeks ago at a congress in Bata, capital of the Rio Muni province, of the Workers' National Union Party, the only political party allowed. The refugees said that the order had produced an upsurge in the number of people fleeing Equatorial Guinea for Cameroun and Gabon. The cocoa crop, which is the country's main source of foreign currency, is usually picked early in the summer, but tasks such as trimming and fumigating must be carried out earlier.<sup>[32]</sup>

Information detrimental to the Equatorial Guinean government which emanates from political refugees who might be motivated to spread such news is, for this reason, sometimes discounted. However, given the fact that Equatorial Guinea's economy depends for its survival on the export of cocoa, that the plantations suddenly found themselves without manpower at a crucial time, and that it had proved impossible in the past to persuade the country's own workers to enlist for the task, it is not at all unlikely that the authorities had resorted to coercion to save the vital crop. President Macias uses strong-arm methods to deal with every other situation. Some coercion was certainly used.

A 1974 report of the United Nations Development Programme states that the Second Congress of the United National Workers' Party decided, in July 1972, 'to introduce at the national level' the Compulsory Labour Act, setting at the same time a non-extendable period of one year for 'all followers [of the

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30 *West Africa*, 19.1.1976, p.90.

31 *West Africa*, 2.2.1976, p.153.

32 *The Times*, London, 6.2.1976.



Party] to be freely employed in different posts'.<sup>[33]</sup>

The UNDP reports failed to record, however, the decision of the party's Third Congress, held in July 1973, to approve 'a plan for the recruitment of 60,000 national workers from all districts for work in agriculture, forestry, roads, etc., as well as the rehabilitation of all estates abandoned by foreigners'.<sup>[34]</sup> The following year, in August 1974—two months before the UNDP report, which fails to mention this, was written—an Extraordinary Congress of PUNT, the ruling party, was called. This noted that the Third Congress had

approved unanimously the Economic Development Plan for the execution of which it was essential to recruit 60,000 national workers for agriculture and forestry. More than a year having elapsed since the adoption of that resolution, this Extraordinary Congress will study, as a matter of priority, what caused the non-fulfilment of the above resolution. Among other consequences of national importance, the recruitment failure has made it impossible to rehabilitate and put into production all the agricultural estates. . . As a logical consequence, there has been a perceptible fall in the production of our basic exports: coffee, cocoa, timber, and others.<sup>[35]</sup>

As a result the Extraordinary Congress ordered the party's District Committees to submit to the government returns of the numbers of labourers recruited in accordance with the decision of the Third Congress.<sup>[36]</sup>

A presidential decree of March 1976, probably 'legalizing' the party's January 1976 resolution referred to by the refugees in Madrid, made it compulsory for all citizens over the age of 15 years to render compulsory manual labour in government plantations and mines.<sup>[37]</sup>

The fall in production is obvious even from the scant cocoa statistics available. In the years before independence in 1968, annual production was estimated at between 35,000 and 45,000 tonnes. In 1970 exports were about 22,000 tonnes<sup>[38]</sup> and in 1974 they reached only 10,000 tonnes<sup>[39]</sup>. The evacuation of Nigerians in 1975/76 will have the effect of reducing the volume of exports even further in the 1976/77 season.

## Freedom and religion

In an interview with Graham Mytton of the BBC in 1975, Macias explained

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- 33 UNDP, Assistance Requested by the Government of Equatorial Guinea for the period 1974-1978. Country and Inter-country Programming. Governing Council, Nineteenth Session, 15-31 January 1975, Agenda item 4, DP/GC/EQG/R.1, 23 October 1974, p.42.
- 34 Resoluciones generales adaptadas en el tercer congreso nacional del partido unico nacional de trabajadores de Guinea Ecuatorial celebrado en Bata (Rio Muni) durante los dias 9, 10, 11, 12 y 13 de julio del ano 1973.
- 35 Comité Central. I Congreso Nacional Extraordinario del PUNT; decisiones adoptadas. Bata, Agosto de 1974.
- 36 *ibid.*
- 37 ANRD Central Committee document, signed by Crisanto Masie Esono, datelined Ambam, 6 April 1976.
- 38 International Monetary Fund, *op.cit.*, p.326.
- 39 UNDP Living Conditions. . . *op.cit.* p.6.

that while he believed in freedom it was a freedom which was 'carefully ordered'.<sup>[40]</sup> This definition appears to exclude the freedoms of citizenship, for the Third Congress of PUNT in July 1973 decided 'to fix a certain period of time for all Equatorial Guinean students in Spain to return to their country. This period cannot be extended and once it expires those who have not returned will automatically lose their nationality'. The decision followed an official announcement issued by the Equatorial Guinean embassy in Madrid the previous year, stating that 'following high-ranking ministerial orders the issue and renewal of passports is suspended'. Another freedom denied to the people of Equatorial Guinea is the right to communicate freely. Article 36 of the 1973 constitution establishes that 'correspondence is inviolable and can be opened only in the cases mentioned by the law', but since no law to this effect has been passed, censorship continues. The UNDP advises its personnel that 'both letter and parcel post services exist but virtually only for incoming mail. Delays are common owing to the rigid censorship in force'.<sup>[41]</sup>

Religious freedom is also strictly circumscribed. A document emanating from the Central Committee of PUNT at the end of 1974 announced that

all meetings and religious gatherings are forbidden inside the national territory. Processions are banned and the authorities, the people's revolutionary militia and the revolutionary masses in the party are invited to watch the subversive activities of the Catholic and other missionaries in Equatorial Guinea. These can be arrested, like any other Guinean citizen, when suspected and brought to court and judged on grounds of subversion.<sup>[42]</sup>

News reached Geneva in June 1976, and was conveyed to the UN Human Rights Division, that Mons. Alberto Maria Ndongo, the Vicar of Bata Diocese, had been killed in his prison cell in Bata, and that two other clerics, Ildefonso Obama and Luis Ondo Mayie, were in detention.<sup>[43]</sup> Missionaries of all persuasions have been persecuted in Equatorial Guinea, and two Catholic bishops, Mgr. F. Gomez Marijuan and Mgr. R. Nze Abuy, have been compelled to leave the country. The 1974 'plot' in Bata jail (see page 23) was said to have been carried out by members of an organization called 'Crusade for the liberation of Equatorial Guinea through Christ' (*Cruzada de liberacion de Guinea Ecuatorial por Cristo*). In April 1975 Macias addressed a gathering of the 'Female Revolutionary Section of PUNT' warning women against contact with missionaries<sup>[44]</sup>. A secret directive a few days later to government delegates stated that donations to missionaries were forbidden, that 'priests and pastors are not allowed to travel inside the country or abroad for that

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40 Mytton, Graham, BBC interview on 30.7.1975, author's transcript.

41 UNDP, *Living Conditions*, op.cit., p.9.

42 *Unidad de Guinea Ecuatorial*, 22.11.1974, p.5.

43 Letter from Esteban Nsue to Mr. Jakob Th. Möller, UN Human Rights Division, Geneva, 15.6.1976.

44 *En Marcha*, Suplemento Informativo del Semanario *La Libertad*, Numero Especial, Bata, 3.4.1975, p.4.

matter', and 'preaching and sermons must be censored beforehand'.<sup>[45]</sup> A decree outlawing all private schools, which were mainly Catholic establishments, had been passed a month earlier.<sup>[46]</sup>

Macias' dislike of missionaries came out very clearly in the BBC interview of 1975, when Graham Mytton asked him whether he felt that all churches in Equatorial Guinea were imperialist agents. Macias replied,

Exactly. During 200 years of Spanish domination in our country the Catholic churches have always acted in favour of the imperialists.

Mytton asked whether Macias was planning action against the churches, if he thought they were agents of imperialism. Macias explained that the only steps taken against missionaries concerned education. This was in line with the philosophy of PUNT: 'We train them [the children] so that we can have their minds according to our party'. He explained that the Catholic church had been abandoned by the people themselves because

before we achieved independence the people saw that it worked in favour of imperialism . . . The churches lost support because they saw this. At the time of the elections before independence, the Catholic church and Spain had their own candidates. When the people, as Catholics, went to confession, the priests used to tell them: 'Don't vote for Macias, vote for the Spanish candidate'. So the people asked themselves, 'What is going on? Is this a church or a political organization?' This is why the people abandoned the church. They saw it was an imperialist organization.<sup>[47]</sup>

## **Torture and murder**

Torture and political murder have become commonplace in Equatorial Guinea. Chapter 1 described how Spain insisted on an unrepresentative configuration of provincial and political forces in the government with which Equatorial Guinea acceded to independence. Fernando Po, with one fifteenth only of the total population of Equatorial Guinea, was guaranteed 12 parliamentary seats out of 35, as well as the vice-presidency, and a virtual veto over the allocation of government revenues. Spain's insistence is largely responsible for the political tensions which arose immediately after independence. And the new constitutional framework, adopted at the Third Congress of PUNT in 1973, allows Macias with the help of PUNT to act without restraint: human rights are no longer respected even in name. The families of Macias' opponents have been victimized by being imprisoned, confined to their villages or deprived of their livelihood. Specific case histories are available but as long as victims are alive it would be dangerous to name them. However, there is no reason why those people who have been executed should not be named.

Macias has made a clean sweep of almost all Equatorial Guinea's educated class. By the end of 1974 more than two-thirds of the members of the 1968 Assembly had 'disappeared', including all those politicians

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45 Republica de Guinea Ecuatorial, office of the civil governor of Rio Muni, Reference No. 1695, Bata, 17.4.1975.

46 Decree 6/1975 of 18.3.1975.

47 Mytton, *op.cit.*, author's transcript.

mentioned in Chapter 1 who were active in the struggle for independence from Spain: only a few of the élite prepared by Spain for office remained alive by 1974.[48]

Bonifacio Ondo Edu, a prominent politician who had been Chief Minister of the autonomous government established in Equatorial Guinea in 1963, was arrested within a month of independence. In January 1969 there were reports of 'a half-baked plot to bring to power the defeated candidate in the September Equatorial Guinea elections, former Chief Minister Bonifacio Ondo Edu, with the help of some Ibos in Fernando Po, and arms from Gabon. Owing to divisions among the Fang in both Rio Muni and Gabon, the Macias government was given details of the plot from Gabon; the arms were impounded at the Gabon-Rio Muni frontier, and the plotters arrested'.[49] Among the 'plotters' were two Deputy Presidents, Antonio Ndongo and Mariano Mba, and Simon Ngomo, who had been governor of Rui Muni under the autonomous government. Mariano Mba and Antonio Ndongo were murdered in Bata prison without having been charged or tried. Simon Ngomo was transferred to Malabo prison where Ondo Edu was being held; both are now dead.[50]

A few weeks later, at the end of February 1969, the Macias government declared a state of emergency after a crisis leading to intervention by Spanish forces. Reports from Madrid explained that the Spanish embassy in Equatorial Guinea had been obliged 'to adopt a series of measures. . . to guarantee the security of Spaniards'.[51] President Macias said that 'the provokers are in fact the ambassador and timber concessionaires'.[52] This set off a mass exodus of Spaniards, and although relations with Spain were soon back to normal, the incident was followed a few days later by what the Macias government claimed was an attempted coup by Foreign Minister and MONALIGE leader, Atanasio Ndongo, with 'imperialist' help.

According to the official version Ndongo was cornered in the cabinet room, jumped out of the window and died from the serious injuries he sustained as a result of the suicide attempt. According to the reports of political refugees he was killed by the President's bodyguard, who first broke both his legs with blows from rifle butts.[53] His wife, a relative of the Camerounian opposition leader, Felix Moumié, was killed after terrible public torture.[54]

The attempted coup, if this is what it really was, set off the brutal repression of Macias' rivals and opponents, which continues to this day. Pastor Torao Sikara, a Deputy President and the most important Bubi chief, died of thirst in Bata jail, and Enrique Gori Molubela, one of the founders of

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48 International Commission of Jurists, *The Review*, Geneva, December 1974, p.12.

49 *West Africa*, 25.1.1969, p.91.

50 International Commission of Jurists, op.cit., p.11; *Jeune Afrique*, 17.10.1975; *Africa*, June 1974.

51 *West Africa*, 8.3.1969, p.283.

52 *ibid.*

53 *Financial Times*, London, 17.2.1970; International Commission, op.cit.

54 *Nigrizia* (Italy) No.7, 1 April 1975, p.30.



the Union Bubi, died of gangrene after having his eyes gouged out.<sup>[55]</sup> The list of victims shows that Macias' targets were chiefly intellectuals. (He once said that 'these so-called intellectuals are the greatest problem facing Africa today. They are polluting our climate with foreign culture'.<sup>[56]</sup>)

On 13 June 1974 an Equatorial Guinean broadcast announced the discovery of a plot whereby 114 political prisoners in Bata jail were said to have planned a *coup d'état* with the help of Macias' exiled opponents and with material help from 'imperialists'. The government newspapers said that several of the plotters died in the course of their abortive rebellion on 10 June, while several others committed suicide on the same day, as soon as they realized that their plot had been discovered.<sup>[57]</sup> Curiously, however, some of the 'suicides' were subsequently reported to have made lengthy statements—quoted verbatim—before a tribunal, explaining their part in the alleged plot. The tribunal sat from 22 to 26 June, a fortnight after the supposed suicides. One of those reported as having killed himself was Dr. Manuel Combe, a former director of Health Services, who, it was officially claimed, distributed poison to his fellow conspirators before committing suicide.<sup>[58]</sup>

Suicide among political prisoners in Equatorial Guinea seems to have reached epidemic proportions. Edmundo Bosio Dioco, the leader of the Union Bubi who had become Vice-President, is supposed to have committed suicide in February 1975 by taking an overdose of barbiturates. According to exiles, however, he was tortured and then shot in the head. Government sources claimed that he left a note explaining his suicide, but that its contents could not be revealed since it was in the hands of the General Directorate of Security.<sup>[59]</sup>

It might be thought that the 'disappearance' of prominent public figures, particularly when it occurs *en masse*, would be difficult to disguise from the world. Foreign ministers, vice-presidents, members of cabinet and diplomats were known to many of their African colleagues, to officials and businessmen in Spain, and to the international community at large. What action, for instance, was taken by the foreign friends of Saturnino Ibongo, a young diplomat who had graduated at the prestigious University of Navarra in Spain and then gone on to study international relations in America? At independence Macias had urged him to abandon his studies—'in the interest of our great nation'—and become Equatorial Guinea's first ambassador to the United Nations. He complied, but within less than four months he was recalled for 'urgent consultations'. On arrival at the airport in Malabo he was accused of being an accomplice of Atanasio Ndongo; protesting his innocence, he was taken behind a nearby bush and summarily executed within minutes.<sup>[60]</sup>

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55 *Jeune Afrique*, 17.10.1975, p.24.

56 *Africa*, June 1974, p.22.

57 *Unidad de la Guinea Ecuatorial*, Bata, No. Extra, June 1974, p.3.

58 Oyono Ayingono, Daniel, *El Baile de los Maltidos*, *La Libertad*, Bata, pp.29-31.

59 *Le Monde*, Paris 16-17.2.1975.

60 *Africa*, June 1974, p.22.



This catalogue of death concentrates only on the best-known political leaders and says nothing of the hundreds of men, women and even children who were unknown outside their own country when they met similar fates. In many cases people have been punished or executed without even a pretence that they were guilty of a crime. This is especially true of women whose only crime was that they were related to politicians or officials who have fallen out of favour.<sup>[61]</sup> In some cases whole villages have been destroyed when a member of the community was accused of disloyalty to Macias or some such crime. An example of this was recently supplied by the Alianza Nacional de Restauracion Democratica (ANRD), a broad front of Equatorial Guinean opposition groups in exile.

The case concerns the governor of Equatorial Guinea's Central Bank, Mr. Jesus Buendiy Ndongo, which is interesting in several respects, not least because it is verifiable (witnesses are accessible) and because the UN Human Rights Division has been informed of it.

In June 1976, Mr. C.M. Nchama, an executive member of ANRD, said he had been notified by friends in Cameroun 'that Mr. Buendiy's village has been burned down'. The place's name was Lea; it had been burned down in April or May, and this fact had been announced over the Equatorial Guinean radio. Mr. Nchama said that the broadcast had stated that

the home village of an opponent of the President had been burned down as an example to others, so that people won't dare to do the same [i.e. oppose the President]. Mr. Buendiy was mentioned by name by the radio.

Nchama said he had known Buendiy personally and had met him in Madrid, when Buendiy had told him 'that things in Guinea were very bad. Everybody was very surprised that he wanted to go back, but he did go back'. Mr. Nchama said he thought Buendiy had hoped to be able to change things for the better in Equatorial Guinea. He had been appointed by Macias and had remained loyal:

His wife is now living in Switzerland. Mr. Buendiy studied economics in Freybourg, when Equatorial Guinea was still under Spanish rule, and he married a Swiss girl. When conditions in Equatorial Guinea became bad, she returned to Switzerland. We now believe that Mr. Buendiy has been killed. Before that he was in and out of prison.<sup>[62]</sup>

Mr. Buendiy's plight was brought to the attention of the UN Human Rights Division by Mr. Esteban Nsue Ngomo, another ANRD member, in a letter of 15 June 1976, in which he stated that Mr. Buendiy was in prison, with both arms broken as a result of torture, and in a very bad state of health.

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61 Among those women who have died, according to ANRD records, are the following (names of husbands in brackets:): Edelvina Oyana (Bonifacio Ondo Edu), Bonita Eyanga (Frederico Ngomo Nandongo), Candida Nchama (Carmelo Mitogo Esono), Susana Ewui (Angel Nguema Efua), Ramona Mikue (Manuel Asumu Mba), Maria Mbu Nsue (Felipe Aseco), Juanita Esame (Epifanio Oma Nkomi).

62 Transcript of author's interview with Mr. Nchama in Geneva on 22.6.1976. The fact that Lea had been destroyed was confirmed to the author by another ANRD leader, Mr. Esteban Nsue Ngomo, who had, however, not heard that the news of the incident had been broadcast.

He also mentioned that the village had been burned down.<sup>[63]</sup>

At the end of June another exile group, the Revolutionary Union of Equatorial Guinea, said in Madrid that Buendía and several other prominent officials including the dismissed Finance Minister, Mr. Nkoo Iyasa, were to be executed on July 7. The central bank governor was said to have been accused of trying to leave the country with \$1,000,000.<sup>[64]</sup>

## Refugees

Much of the recent information about Equatorial Guinea comes from exiles: thousands have fled the country, including the former police chief of Malabo, Ciriaco Ndombo, who, according to other refugees 'had achieved considerable distinction through the ill-treatment of Guineans'.<sup>[65]</sup> Estimates of the numbers of refugees involved vary considerably. ANRD claims that a quarter of the country's population lives in exile, while the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) gives much lower estimates but admits that there is no certainty. A comparison of the statistics is illuminating:

Place of exile	Number of Refugees	
	UNHCR estimate <sup>[66]</sup>	ANRD estimate
Gabon	1,000 – 2,000	60,000
Cameroun	300	30,000
Spain	200 (or 3,500 <sup>[67]</sup> )	
Europe		5,000

President Macías seems to fear that the presence of such large numbers in Gabon and Cameroun constitutes a threat to his security. A number of refugees have been captured by his agents, taken back to Equatorial Guinea

63 Letter from Esteban Nsue to Mr. Jakob Th. Möller, op.cit.  
This letter also referred to the assassination in September 1975 of 28 political prisoners. It also mentioned the former first secretary at the embassy in Madrid, Laureano Ndong Nangale, who had been tortured and was in prison, and who later was among those reported to await execution.

64 *The Times*, 28.6.1976 and *West Africa*, 5.7.1976, p.968.

65 *ibid.*

66 Estimate of September 1975, and supplied to the author by the World Council of Churches. Mr. Cherif, the UNHCR official dealing with the matter, told the author on 24.6.1976 in Geneva that he had no idea of the figures involved, but he added that the UNHCR had made available \$30,000, and the WCC a similar sum, for the subsistence of refugees in Cameroun. This suggests that the numbers of exiles in West Africa are larger than the UNHCR is prepared to admit.

67 The larger figure in Spain was supplied to the author by Mr. da Cunha of the Latin American/Iberian and Oceanic Section of the UNHCR on 24.6.1976 who seemed much better informed than his colleague in the African section.

and executed.<sup>[68]</sup> Dr. Gustavo Watson Bueko, who once served as ambassador to Cameroun, and Sgt. Jovino Edu Mbuy, formerly of the Equatorial Guinean National Guard, were kidnapped in Cameroun. Juan Mangue Asumu, a former official in the Macias administration, was captured in Gabon.<sup>[69]</sup> In December 1975 a delegation from Equatorial Guinea, headed by Foreign Minister Ngueme Issono Tchama, visited Yaoundé to discuss 'matters of mutual interest'—in fact, to negotiate the return of the refugees in Cameroun. The Cameroun government argued that expelling the refugees would offend against African traditions of hospitality; it also reminded the delegation that the exiles were of the same ethnic group as the Camerounians and were no longer in the camps set aside for their use.<sup>[70]</sup> This was in line with the attitude adopted by President Ahidjo of Cameroun when Equatorial Guinea was still a Spanish colony, and Cameroun harboured political refugees who had escaped the colonial repression. In a reference to developments in Rio Muni in 1968 President Ahidjo stressed that 'the people of that territory who have sought refuge are of the same parentage as our people'.<sup>[71]</sup>

As far as Gabon is concerned, however, the exiles have some misgivings because of France's growing economic influence in their country. The French involvement, which started a few years ago following a West African tour by President Pompidou,<sup>[72]</sup> has been actively encouraged by Gabon.<sup>[73]</sup> Gabon's interest in Rio Muni led to the 'war' of 1972, when Gabon, in the course of extending its territorial waters to 170 miles, occupied the islands of Mbanié and Cocotiers. (See p.8) It was widely said that the incident involved oil, which is present in Gabon's offshore waters and has also been found off Rio Muni.<sup>[74]</sup> Through the lack of any public statement on how the dispute was finally resolved, and in view of the French-Spanish treaty of 1900 giving France the right of preemption, the refugees fear that some territorial deal might one day affect their status.

President Bongo of Gabon has already been accused by one of the exiles of handing over one political refugee to President Macias; and M. Thierry Mignon, a French lawyer who in 1974 took evidence from the Equatorial Guineans in Gabon, concluded in his report that the exiles feared that they might be 'bartered' at any moment.<sup>[75]</sup> Whether this fear is justified or not, the government of Gabon certainly knows what is happening in Equatorial Guinea, and the same is true of other African countries, notably Nigeria and Cameroun.

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68 *Afrique-Asie*, No.78, March 1975, p.51.

69 *Vie de Terreur en République de Guinée Equatoriale*. Unsigned MS dated March 1974. The information and style of the report correspond to later ANRD reports.

70 *Jeune Afrique*, 2.1.1976.

71 *ibid.*

72 *Marchés Tropicaux*, Paris 2.5.1975, p.1295.

73 *Jeune Afrique*, 2.11.1974, p.41.

74 *Jeune Afrique*, 4.11.1972, pp.22-35.

75 Thierry Mignon, Avocat à la Cour d'Appel de Paris à la Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme. Mission concernant la Guinée Equatoriale, August 1974, p.11.

## **President Macias' reply**

President Macias' answer to refugee accusations is to blame 'Spanish imperialists'. Macias claims that they and other reactionary interests are not only behind the plots which he believes are being constantly hatched against him, but are also mounting a smear campaign against his country when stories about the elimination of his opponents appear in the international press, which is not very often, considering the number of his victims. For example, in 1975, during the Organization of African Unity summit meeting in Kampala, serious allegations were put to President Macias personally by the BBC reporter, Graham Mytton.

Early on in the interview Mytton referred to 'the many stories about exiles from your country living abroad' and asked Macias to comment. 'It is not true that we have people, our citizens, in exile', Macias replied. 'This is subversive information against me'.

**BBC:** Who is responsible for this subversive information?

**Macias:** It is a capitalist imperialist nation — Spain.

**BBC:** Can I refer to a recent report in a Kenyan newspaper, the 'Sunday Nation', which says that one sixth of the population is living outside the country, and that many people have been killed inside the country since independence?

**Macias:** It is false information. . . Even in Kenya, or anywhere else, newspapers are being directed by Spanish imperialism. But we don't care about this false information because all people know that this is not true. Spanish imperialism is bringing this false information against our country. . . We know very well that very many people in Spain are against Franco's fascist regime. . .

**BBC:** But why should Spain wish to do this? Spain has given Equatorial Guinea independence; why should Spain wish to interfere in the way Your Excellency has said?

**Macias:** Yes, we achieved our independence. But this was not a gift from Spain. We achieved it by fighting, and many Guineans died for the sake of independence. . . When all these countries publish reports about us, you know that England is imperialist, the United States is imperialist, France is imperialist, all those countries are imperialists. We know very well why they write against us.

**BBC:** Many people would accept that Spain is a fascist country and does adopt brutal methods. But I am really asking about Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guineans have been to the World Council of Churches in Geneva and have reported, for example, that many people have been killed, that former politicians in your own govern-



ment have disappeared, that various people have been forced into exile. . .

**Macias:** This Church organization is in an imperialist country and is itself imperialist, so they can never say anything good about us. Those people who are dying at this moment in Northern Ireland, are they from Equatorial Guinea?

Graham Mytton repeatedly asked whether Macias would allow the BBC and other media to send reporters to Equatorial Guinea. At first Macias was negative, suggesting even that he might lock up a reporter who came to his country, if he had misrepresented Equatorial Guinea in the past. He insisted that, belonging to 'imperialist countries', the news media would malign him. Towards the end of the long interview Mytton put the question again, explaining that he personally allowed nobody to dictate what he should report; he had been to other African countries which had not had any complaints about the way he had represented them. Would Macias allow him into Equatorial Guinea?

**Macias:** Any time you want to come to Equatorial Guinea to do your job, you can do this, although we know very well, as I said before, that you will never tell the truth about our country. But you can come at any time to try and do your job. . .

What has happened is this: We are the only Spanish-speaking country in the African continent, but Spain does not help us—the only country in Africa that speaks Spanish, like themselves. . . Spain, instead of assisting us, is trying to create a campaign against our country to spread false information against us. . . When we achieved our independence they abandoned us, just as they did in Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico and all those Latin American countries. If Spain were a true country it would create a group of all these Spanish-speaking countries and hold them together, like England has done with the English-speaking countries and France with the French-speaking countries.

Although the English are imperialist and colonialist, they have done something in their territories. There was a moment when they helped and assisted those countries. Spain has never done this. It has only abandoned us, and in abandoning us has tried to create confusion and difficulties for the only country they had in Africa, speaking their language.

Spain has been in our country for 200 years of colonial rule, but during these 200 years they have done nothing for us. Our country does not even have a water system, it does not have electricity, it does not have roads. Nothing. Well, we are trying to do these things now by ourselves. Well, you will see for yourself, we will show you. The port which the Spaniards have left in our country, and the port which we ourselves have made. All the things which the Spaniards have taken from our country — our cocoa, our coffee, our timber,



all our riches — they carried to their own country to fix themselves up with big roads, big houses. They have made their country very beautiful when in our country — the place they have taken all this wood from — we do not even have a water system. This is the truth. When they speak about God I don't believe them, when people who speak about God, who have God-feeling, can do things like that. Finally I tell you that we, who live in our country, do not care what they are saying abroad. We only try to develop our country; they can say anything they want, we accept it. We live in our country without any trouble, in peace, and trying to develop the provinces. The journalists who side with Spain — well, that is their own business. Let them side with Spain.<sup>[76]</sup>

### 3 Foreign silence

With events such as those described in the last chapter taking place regularly in Equatorial Guinea, it is surprising that so little has been written about the country in the international press.<sup>[77]</sup> This is even more surprising given that international aid agencies, international business companies and some foreign governments have had representatives in Equatorial Guinea since independence in 1968.

The subject of Equatorial Guinea has not been raised at the Organization of African Unity: the OAU has strict rules about non-interference in what it considers to be the domestic affairs of its member states. Nevertheless, there are limits to the tolerance of some African leaders. For instance President Nyerere of Tanzania refused to attend the 1975 OAU summit meeting in Kampala because of the brutal and arbitrary rule of that country's leader, and he has pointed out that black Africans could not shut their eyes to atrocities committed in their own countries any more than they could accept what was happening in white-ruled South Africa or Rhodesia. It is to be hoped that President Macias will be denounced in similar terms one day by some of his colleagues at the OAU.

The OAU has provided Equatorial Guinea with some technical assistance, particularly in the field of health — doctors from Sudan and Egypt — and it has made available some scholarships.<sup>[78]</sup> At the beginning of 1971 Libya

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77 One early exception was an otherwise not unsympathetic account of life in Equatorial Guinea after a well-known British correspondent had visited the island at the beginning of 1970. Noting that the government had resorted to public execution, he wrote that 'a first batch of murderers were unskillfully hanged at Bata on the mainland early in December while another group met their end in Fernando Po on Christmas Eve. After a kind of public trial before most of the Cabinet in which assembled population was asked to endorse the verdict, they were shot or hanged to the strains of Mary Hopkins singing 'Those were the days' over the loud-speaker system.' The writer then commented that 'such incidents can do no good to Equatorial Guinea's reputation in the world at large and the government probably only gets away with them because so little ever gets out about its doings.' *Financial Times* 17.2.1970.

78 UNDP, Assistance requested . . . op.cit.p.39.

made a gift of 70 million pesetas (about \$1 million) to Equatorial Guinea.<sup>[79]</sup> But the African aid has been negligible compared to that furnished by non-African countries and international organizations. Throughout the period of Macias' repression there have been foreigners resident in Equatorial Guinea, and the country has been visited by foreigners: diplomats, experts and aid missions. Yet none of these witnesses seem to have indicated by word or deed that they thought something unusual was happening in Equatorial Guinea.

## Spain

Spain, as the former colonial power, has been particularly well informed, and her attitude, to put it mildly, seems mysterious. The complete official silence maintained by Madrid was extended in January 1971 to the media, when the government declared news or comment about Equatorial Guinea *materia reservada*, a classification which prohibits the publication of any information about the subject concerned in the Spanish press. The ban was renewable every six months, and on 9 August 1974, when Prince Juan Carlos presided over a ministerial council meeting during General Franco's illness, it was decided to lift the censorship which had been imposed in connection with Equatorial Guinea.<sup>[80]</sup> Despite the decision and an official announcement that the ban was about to be removed, the ban remained, indicating that powerful circles in Spain were determined to prevent any public discussion of Equatorial Guinea. A year later, on the occasion of yet another six months of silence being imposed, the press in Madrid observed that informed circles in Spain were

questioning the reasons behind the prolongation by the government. . . of the designation of Equatorial Guinea as *materia reservada*. . . We are asking ourselves, Why?<sup>[81]</sup>

A further six months of censorship were imposed in February 1976.

In view of Spain's continued economic involvement in Equatorial Guinea one must suppose that Madrid would find it embarrassing if the true nature of Macias' rule were to be revealed. After independence 90 per cent of Equatorial Guinea's exports continued to go to Spain, while about 70 per cent of her imports were Spanish.<sup>[82]</sup> In fact Equatorial Guinea's dependence on Spain for manufactured goods grew even greater after independence: in 1970 her imports from countries other than Spain amounted to less than 20 per cent of the total, compared to the average of 35 per cent between 1963-67, before independence.<sup>[83]</sup> Spain continued to enjoy highly preferential tariffs in Equatorial Guinea until January 1972: special rates of local duty were 30 per cent *ad valorem* on goods from Spain

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79 IMF, op.cit. p.350.

80 *Le Monde*, 11-12.8.1974, *La Vanguardia Española*, 11.8.74.

81 *La Vanguardia Española*, 26.8.75.

82 IMF, op.cit.p.360.

83 *ibid.* p.352

and 75 per cent on all others.[84]

An economic cooperation agreement signed between Spain and Equatorial Guinea in May 1969 stipulated that Spain had to buy every year from Equatorial Guinea at least 20,000 tonnes of cocoa, 1,850 tonnes of cocoa products, 6,000 tonnes of coffee, 215,500 tonnes of wood and lesser quantities of other agricultural products.[85] The same agreement laid down that Equatorial Guinea was not allowed to export this produce to countries other than Spain before these quotas had been met.[86] Spain undertook to pay for Equatorial Guinea's produce at higher prices, normally above world market levels, than for similar raw materials originating elsewhere. In return Equatorial Guinea undertook to give preference to Spanish goods, provided these were competitive in price and quality with those from other parts of the world.[87] In 1970, the last year for which detailed figures are available, 90.5 per cent by value of Equatorial Guinea's total exports went to Spain, including 86 per cent by value of all the cocoa exported and all the coffee and timber exports.[88] During the same year 80.46 per cent by value of all imports were Spanish.[89]

The 1969 agreement was renewed in 1971<sup>[90]</sup> and again in 1973.<sup>[91]</sup> In 1975 Spain was reported to be giving Equatorial Guinea "appreciable" budgetary assistance, on top of the "cultural" aid which amounted to 7 million pesetas (\$108,000) annually.<sup>[92]</sup> The 1969 agreement granted Equatorial Guinea aid of 426 million pesetas (\$6 million) to make up for budgetary shortfalls.<sup>[93]</sup> It also covered Equatorial Guinea's entry into the IMF.<sup>[94]</sup> A technical and cultural aid agreement was signed in November 1969, during the visit of the Spanish Minister for Education to the first anniversary of independence celebrations in Malabo.<sup>[95]</sup> In February 1975 the Spanish government granted credits of 50 million pesetas (\$780,000) a year for three years, mainly for the purchase of equipment for the cocoa plantations.<sup>[96]</sup> By way of aid Spain also supplied pilots, technicians and administrative personnel to run the Equatorial Guinean airline, LAGE and, in accordance with a five-year agreement signed with Madrid in 1969, the National Telephone Company of Spain, CTNE, has been supplying personnel to help run Equatorial Guinea's telecommunications network.<sup>[97]</sup>

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84 *Africa Contemporary Record, Annual Survey and Documents 1970-71*, Legum, Colin ed., Rex Collings, London, 1971, p.A118.

85 IMF op.cit, p.354

86 *ibid.* p.361.

87 *ibid.* p.364.

88 *ibid.* p.353.

89 *ibid.* p.351.

90 *ibid.* p.364.

91 *Marchés Tropicaux*, 2.5.1975, p.1295.

92 *ibid.*

93 *Africa Contemporary Record*, op.cit., p.A118.

94 IMF op.cit.

95 *Africa Contemporary Record*, op.cit.p.A118.

96 *El Eco de Canaria*, Canaries, 15.2.1975.

97 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit.pp.50,51.



The management of some of the plantations "abandoned" by their Spanish owners has been left to Equatorial Guinea's National Deposit and Development Bank; and the National Forestry Institute in Rio Benito assumed responsibility for the large stock of machinery left behind by the Spanish firms on their timber concessions. According to a UNDP report, the forestry institute "has thus far been unable to take the necessary measures to organize the forestry industry, and today, after a lapse of five years, much of that equipment has deteriorated. The same is happening with the timber already cut and ready for export."<sup>[98]</sup> However, according to the UNDP document

the government is now interested in reactivating the forestry industry by granting concessions to foreign companies

and a concession to a Spanish firm was under consideration. Furthermore, 'the SENFSA Company, which for some years has had a furniture industry in Bata, was also interested in a forestry concession and was taking the necessary steps to obtain one'.<sup>[99]</sup> With the revival of the timber industry

it is hardly likely that Spain will again be able to obtain all kinds of timber for the production of sawnwood as it did up to 1968, when the Spanish business had their own holdings. Profit at that time was not derived solely from forestry exploitation but also from the commercial activity carried on by those firms in Spain itself.<sup>[100]</sup>

## France

According to an FAO expert, Equatorial Guinea's forest reserves are considerably larger than those of Gabon,<sup>[101]</sup> and the UNDP report of September 1974, referring to the government's decision to reactivate the forest industry and grant foreign concessions, said:

The first company to benefit from this policy is a French-Swiss company known as the Forestry Company of Rio Muni.<sup>[102]</sup> It has a 10-year concession of 150,000 hectares of virgin forest in the south-eastern part of Rio Muni. It expects to extract 1,500,000 tons of timber, including okume and other species, for which there is a market demand.<sup>[103]</sup>

This compares with average total exports of about 260,000 tonnes a year before independence.<sup>[104]</sup>

France has been reported as seeking 'a monopoly for the exploitation of the forests' in Equatorial Guinea,<sup>[105]</sup> and of having 'accorded a loan of almost seven hundred million CFA (about \$2,800,000) for the construction of Bata port, in return for numerous forestry concessions to French

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98 *ibid.* p.20.

99 *ibid.* p.20.

100 *ibid.* p.20.

101 *ibid.* p.19.

102 This company has also been referred to by the name of Forestal Rio Muni.

103 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . *op.cit.* p.20.

104 IMF, *op.cit.* p.327.

105 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 27.2.75, p.43.

firms'. [106]

France's interest in Equatorial Guinea, according to the well-informed French journal, *Marchés Tropicaux*, started 'on the initiative of President Pompidou whose attention was drawn to the position of this small country during one of his African journeys'. The opening of an embassy in Malabo has allowed 'our private sector, with the support of export guarantees, to counterbalance the influence of Eastern countries, notably the USSR, always on the search for fishing bases'. It was in this context that three French firms went to work in Equatorial Guinea

under conditions which were obviously much more difficult than those in neighbouring francophone countries, particularly concerning the regular supply of provisions. However, they have always received the support of the authorities there, and apart from certain difficulties with regulations which should be quickly solved, they have worked efficiently in the domain of public works (modernisation of Bata harbour and the administrative complex in Malabo) as much as in the agricultural field (technical staff for cocoa and coffee) and in the exploitation of the Rio Muni forests, whose development was unfortunately checked by the fall in the world price of Okumé. These [timber concessions] are, however, capable of being developed. Talks are now in progress with regard to intervention in the industrial field. *On his side President Francis Macias has presumably found it profitable to work with the representatives of our firms in an efficient and politically disinterested atmosphere.*

The writer repeated that France did not find herself in the privileged position she enjoyed in her former colonies, but

it must be admitted that our compatriots have not had cause to complain about the local administration. *When asked about any signs of political unrest, which cannot be denied, they say that this has only had a slight influence on their daily lives.* [107]

This report, dated May 1975, when hundreds of politicians, officials and others had already been executed, and thousands more had fled, also stresses the support given to Macias in his external relations by the French ambassadors, first M. Henri Bernard and then M. Didier Raguénat. (In May 1976 M. Jacques Fournier was nominated to succeed M. Raguénat. [108] )

The modernization of Bata harbour referred to above was described in the 1974 UNDP report as 'the construction of the new port of Bata with a capacity of 400,000 tons a year'. The first phase of the entire scheme, the cost of which was put at \$11 million, had been 'completed with French assistance'. The second phase, including the construction of landing, transport and warehouse facilities, was under way. [109] The administrative complex in Malabo was described elsewhere as 'a luxurious palace, reminiscent in style of the Palais de Chaillot in Paris', constructed at the cost of three hundred million CFA (\$1.2 million) by the French company, Dragages.' [110]

The number of French personnel involved in all these projects in recent years must have been considerable. It is therefore instructive to note the self-

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106 *Jeune Afrique* No.721, 2.11.1974, p.41.

107 *Marchés Tropicaux*, 2.5.1975. 1295. (author's stress)

108 *Le Monde*, 27.5.1976.

109 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit., p.50.

110 *Jeune Afrique*, No.721, 2.11.74, p.41.

righteous tone in which a later issue of *Marchés Tropicaux* justified the presence of French firms in Equatorial Guinea. This was in January 1976, when the exodus of Nigerian workers had caused some international press comment on the general state of affairs in the country. Under the title Equatorial Guinea and the Nigerian Workers, the article opened:

The news concerning Equatorial Guinea must be considered with much circumspection. In fact, it should not be forgotten that in presenting unconfirmed rumours as authentic, this could do harm to our nationals who work in the agricultural, forestry and public works sector, and whose security has never been put at risk. Because of certain leanings of President Macias to the Eastern countries, notably the USSR which uses Malabo as a base for deep-sea fishing, criticism of his regime could be interpreted as being 'anti-progressive', which is obviously far from being our intention.

The writer then claimed that the latest disquieting news had been inflated by Lagos and the World Council of Churches (which, he suggests, is under American influence) to the point where

It appears difficult not to make a stand, without encouraging accusations of Phariseism or complicity.

He then admitted that the disappearance of certain personalities remained to be explained and, after naming some of these, suggested that

in order to clear itself of the imputations of political murder which have been made against it by its opponents, it should be easy for the government in Malabo to allow these personalities [who have disappeared] access to lawyers, or at least to issue a communique concerning them.[111]

## United States

The United States government suspended relations with Equatorial Guinea on 15 March 1976, under somewhat mysterious circumstances. The embassy in Malabo had already been closed several years earlier, and the US mission at Yaounde was responsible for America's diplomatic links with Equatorial Guinea. At the beginning of March 1976 the US Ambassador and Consul in Yaoundé visited Equatorial Guinea, and a few days later Washington announced that a letter containing remarks which were insulting to the United States had been handed by Equatorial Guinean officials to the diplomats. Relations were thereupon suspended by the Department of State.[112] However, a spokesman at the US embassy in London, asked for details, said that it had not been the United States but Equatorial Guinea which had broken relations, under Cuban pressure, he suggested.[113] This was when Cuba's intervention in Angola was Washington's principal concern in Africa.

Although America has given some assistance, for instance a mass

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111 *Marchés Tropicaux*, 2.1.1976. p.9.

112 *Journal de Geneve*, 29.3.1976.

113 Author's interview with Mr. Seitz, Political Section, US embassy, London, May 1976.

campaign against smallpox and measles carried out with US/AID help in 1963-1971<sup>[114]</sup>, America's main interest in Equatorial Guinea has been in minerals. Offshore exploration for oil off Rio Muni was carried out for some years by two American companies, Continental Oil and Standard Oil, and by one Spanish company, CEPSA.<sup>[115]</sup> For a while there had also been rumours of oil discoveries near Fernando Po. However, it later transpired that the company concerned, Gulf Oil, disturbed by the civil war in Nigeria, had simply transferred its base across to Fernando Po while the actual prospecting continued in Nigerian waters.<sup>[116]</sup>

About \$15 million was invested in oil exploration in Equatorial Guinea, apparently without positive results. A UN report commented that

one UN expert believes that this should not lead to pessimism as oil was found in neighbouring Gabon and Nigeria after considerably more drillings than the seven attempts made so far in Equatorial Guinea. The report mentions that necessary geological conditions are present for petroleum strikes. An aero-geophysical survey has been performed by an American consultant for an American oil company looking for oil in Rio Muni. It covered about 25 per cent of the surface of Rio Muni. This has been held up by lack of funds and trained personnel. In 1969 an American steel company offered to explore all of Rio Muni for possible minerals. The government did not accept the offer because it found the money offered and the estimated maximum investment too low. The government also did not like the company's request for monopoly rights in search for all minerals. <sup>[117]</sup>

The aero-geophysical survey and the US offer to explore for possible minerals may be related to the occasional references to uranium in Rio Muni. For instance, a World Council of Churches periodical stated in 1974 that 'there are thought to be substantial deposits of a key mineral, uranium, sought after by all industrial countries.'<sup>[118]</sup> Other sources also claim that Rio Muni is 'rich in uranium'<sup>[119]</sup> and the presence of this mineral is mentioned in several other publications. The 1974 UNDP report refers to 'indications of the existence of certain metals and of oil'.<sup>[120]</sup>

The presence of uranium, as of oil, would not be surprising, considering that both occur in neighbouring countries. Gabon is an important source of the former, having supplied much of the material for France's nuclear programme, and has important quantities of the latter. At least the possibility of important uranium deposits might supply one answer to the intriguing question about the international silence on Equatorial Guinea in the face of the excesses of the Macias regime. After all, oppressive rule in, for instance,

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114 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit. p.38.

115 *Jeune Afrique*, 4.11.1972.

116 Cronje, S. *The World and Nigeria, a diplomatic history of the Biafran War 1967-70*. Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1972, pp.258, 303.

117 UNCTAD/UNDP Project on Training and Advisory Services on the GSP (INT-27 - March 1973).

118 *One World*, November 1974, p.8.

119 Ligue Suisse des Droits de l'Homme, news release, September 1974.

120 *Journal de Genève*, 29.3.1976; *Le Soir*, Brussels, 19.9.1975, *Tribune de Genève*, 22.2.1975; *Actualite*, 15.1.1976, p.8; UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit., p.6.



Uganda and Chile has been taken up by either the Eastern or the Western bloc, while neither seems inclined to make any fuss about what is happening in Equatorial Guinea.

However, in connection with America's attitude in particular it is interesting to note that, after the Nixon administration came to power after the 1968 elections, Secretary of State Kissinger's first public official act was to receive Equatorial Guinea's Foreign Minister, the unfortunate Atanasio Ndong. [121] The priority accorded to the newly independent state by the new American administration was undoubtedly connected with the Nigerian civil war and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) attempt to secure an airbase in Fernando Po to fly relief supplies into Biafra. However, when Ndong died in March 1969, only a few weeks after meeting Dr. Kissinger, the American Secretary of State must surely have remembered meeting him and asked some questions about his fate.

### Switzerland and other European Countries

Other Western countries have been involved in Equatorial Guinea. The Swiss, apart from their association with the French timber firm (see above), have given aid. The Swiss Red Cross, for example, has renovated Malabo hospital at a cost of 4,200,000 pesetas (about \$60,000). [122] West Germany has imported cocoa from Fernando Po [123] and some cocoa has also been imported by Britain. [124] Swedish telecommunications consultants have prepared long-range development plans for the telecommunications system of Equatorial Guinea, and a Swedish company, SWEDTEL, has drawn up proposals for the administrative reorganization of the system. [125]

### China

The main influence in Equatorial Guinea is always said in the Western press to come from the Eastern bloc. But little is known about this. Diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level with Peking were established in October 1970 [126] after the Chinese Ambassador to the People's Republic of Congo, Brazzaville, attended Equatorial Guinea's second independence anniversary. The New China News Agency commented that this development had 'written a new chapter in the annals of friendship between China and Africa. . . We are convinced that relations of friendship and cooperation between China and Equatorial Guinea will develop still further.' [127] China has since been

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121 Cronje, S, op.cit. p.137.

122 UNDP, Assistance requested . . . op.cit.p.38.

123 Official Chamber of Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Fernando Po, list of shipments to Hamburg, 1970.

124 IMF, op.cit., p.350.

125 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit., pp.51,54

126 *Daily Telegraph*, London, 21.10.1970.

127 *Africa Contemporary Record*, op.cit., p.B316.

reported as making interest-free loans to Equatorial Guinea, repayable over 50 years.<sup>[128]</sup> The UNDP merely reports that China 'is helping in the development of rice and cotton cultivation, etc.',<sup>[129]</sup> and lists China as having operational teams in the country in connection with health and road maintenance projects.<sup>[130]</sup>

## USSR

Links with the Soviet Union started at the end of 1970, when an Equatorial Guinean government delegation, headed by the Minister of Public Works, Jesus Oyono (long since dead) left for the USSR and North Korea.<sup>[131]</sup> A trade agreement with Moscow had already been signed in June that year, listing trade items in respect of which the two countries undertook to apply most favoured nation treatment, and similar terms applied to shipping. However, article 12 of the agreement laid down that all commercial transactions had to be settled in convertible currencies,<sup>[132]</sup> and this may be why very little has been heard of Russian trade with Equatorial Guinea. Moscow obtained a base for deep-sea fishing in Malabo and the UNDP listed the USSR as carrying out a pilot project on fishery development.<sup>[133]</sup> Elsewhere the report said in regard to fishing that 'the unilateral assistance provided by only one country consists merely in the delivery to Equatorial Guinea, without charge, of several tons of fish caught in the area under a fishing concession granted by the government'<sup>[134]</sup> — a comment which could only apply to the Soviet Union.

## Cuba

Cuba is shown by the UNDP as being concerned with forestry and education. In the latter sphere the report stressed that

'the most significant event of 1973 was the arrival of substantial Cuban personnel. Despite this assistance and that of Spain, France and other countries, and by regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity, requirements in the field of education and the training of teaching staff remain urgent. Some members of the Cuban team are being integrated into the CED [Centre of Educational Development, a project carried out by the government in Malabo with the cooperation of UNESCO and UNDP, and established by presidential decree in March 1973] as government personnel and others have been assigned to secondary schools.'<sup>[135]</sup>

Although the Cuban mission had been closed by the end of March

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128 *Jeune Afrique*, No. 721, 2.11.1974, p.41.

129 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit. p.13.

130 *ibid.*, pp.79,81

131 *Africa Contemporary Record*, op.cit.p.B316.

132 IMF, op.cit., p.365.

133 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit., p.78.

134 *ibid.*, p.34.

135 *ibid.*, pp.32-33.

1976[136] Mr. David Ennals, Britain's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, told Parliament on March 31, 1976 that Cuban regular soldiers were being employed in Equatorial Guinea in 'advisory and training roles'. [137]

### United Nations agencies

The fact that much of the information on foreign involvement in Equatorial Guinea derives from United Nations sources indicates an appreciable UN presence. The involvement of the UN began a few months after independence, when the government approached the Secretary-General of the UN 'with a request for assistance from the United Nations and specialized agencies in the form of expert advisers and operational personnel in the fields in which the country needed assistance most urgently'. [138] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO) became the most active agencies – particularly the UNDP which maintains an office and staff in Malabo.

Relations between the UNDP and Equatorial Guinea's authorities were not always smooth. The UNDP itself is discreet about the matter and mentions only that a 'multidisciplinary mission was sent to Equatorial Guinea in 1973 by UNDP to review all on-going projects' and assist the government in the reformulation of a revised programme:

With the difficulties that occurred in the Government's relations with UNDP in mid-1973, the follow-up on that mission became impossible. As the relations improved a few months later, the Government and UNDP resumed their negotiations. . . [139]

According to one account,

The office of the UNDP in Malabo, the capital, has been closed down on the orders of Macias Nguema after its Director, Haitian-born Mittchel Louis, and several of his staff were beaten up. Macias Nguema had alleged they were plotting against his government. [140]

What saved them was that they were not indigenous officials, and that Macias needed the United Nations. It took a visit by the UNDP's Chief, Division of Central Africa and Indian Ocean countries, and the Assistant Administrator, Regional Bureau for Africa, to restore relations. The present chief at the Malabo office is a Swede.

UNESCO was one of the earliest agencies in the field, with one of its consultants visiting the country between October 1970-January 1971, advising on the establishment of a modern system of school statistics. [141]

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136 *Journal de Genève*, 29.3.1976.

137 *Daily Telegraph*, 1.4.1976.

138 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit. p.10.

139 UNDP, Country and Intercountry Programming; Country Programme of the Government of Equatorial Guinea. Note by the Administrator. DP/GC/EQG/R.1/RECOMMENDATION, 13.9.1974, p.2.

140 *Africa* No.34, June 1974, p.21.

141 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . op.cit. p.34.

Between March 1970 and January 1973 Equatorial Guinea's Office of Education Planning was assisted by a UNESCO expert in educational planning. Twenty-seven UNESCOPAS (UNESCO Programme for the Provision of Operational and Executive Personnel) teachers arrived in Equatorial Guinea in January 1970 on a one-year mission, and it was later agreed to extend the assistance of 15 UNESCOPAS teacher posts until June 1974.<sup>[142]</sup> There was considerable pressure from the Macias administration to prolong the project, but in September 1974 the UNDP Administrator wrote that 'all necessary measures will be taken to terminate in June 1975 the activities of the UNESCOPAS project'.<sup>[143]</sup> The UNDP also agreed to recruit five UN volunteers to help with secondary education, and three of the five had arrived in the country by March 1974, although 'the two others were no longer available'.<sup>[144]</sup>

In 1970 FAO experts carried out studies on the livestock raising potential of Equatorial Guinea, and another FAO consultant worked on forestry development but 'had to interrupt his mission in September 1972 without having accomplished some of those tasks'.<sup>[145]</sup> A consultant attached to UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) visited Equatorial Guinea from November 1973 to February 1974 to study a palm oil and soap production scheme.<sup>[146]</sup> A specialist in postal services development from the international office of the UPU (Universal Postal Union) toured Equatorial Guinea in August/September 1971 to survey the country's postal services.<sup>[147]</sup> WHO assistance to Equatorial Guinea in the years 1972, 1973 and 1974 was estimated at \$260,000, \$160,000 and \$135,000 respectively;<sup>[148]</sup> that of UNESCO during the same years at \$660,000, \$625,000 and \$487,000.<sup>[149]</sup>

Between May 1972 and April 1973 an International Labour Office (ILO) expert advised the Ministry of Labour about the introduction of a new social security system.<sup>[150]</sup> Another ILO expert advised the Ministry of Labour between February 1972 and January 1973 (at a cost to UNDP of \$30,376)

on the drafting of an Organic Law and Organic Regulations for the Ministry, and a General Labour Act. . . It is considered that following the adoption and application of the Organic Law and Organic Regulations of the Ministry of Labour, a manual describing typical tasks of the Ministry of Labour might be prepared to supplement these two legal texts.

The ILO expert then recommended that Equatorial Guinea

should seek the cooperation of the African Regional Centre for Labour Administration (CRADAT) with headquarters at Yaoundé (Cameroun) with a view to arranging for one

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142 *ibid.*, p.35.

143 UNDP, Country and Inter-country. . . *op.cit.* p.3.

144 UNDP, Assistance requested. . . *op.cit.* p.35.

145 *ibid.* p.21.

146 *ibid.* p.25.

147 *ibid.* p.52.

148 *ibid.* p.76.

149 *ibid.* p.63.

150 *ibid.* p.44.



or two of the Centre's experts to organize and conduct training courses for labour administrators (preferably in Spanish) at Malabo. [151]

Presenting his recommendations for the adoption by the January 1975 UNDP Governing Council meeting of the programme for Equatorial Guinea, the UNDP Administrator stated that

no new project for labour administration has been included under the subsector *man-power, management and labour*. This is due to the possibility of a regional type of assistance in this field. . . and to previously recommended measures. [152]

The UNDP coordinates the activities of most, if not all, of these UN agencies, and its own programme touches on every aspect of public life in Equatorial Guinea. Its headquarters in Malabo serves as a centre for all international activity concerned with the country.

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151 *ibid*, pp.42-43.

152 UNDP, Country and Inter-country. . . *op.cit.*, p.3.

# Conclusion

Since Equatorial Guinea's independence from Spain in 1968, a series of alleged plots and crises have given one man, President Macias, absolute power. His government is among the most brutal and unpredictable in the world. The murder and disappearance of most of his high officials, together with many other real or imagined opponents, has caused up to a quarter of the population to seek refuge in other countries. As was shown in the last chapter, an essential part in the success of this regime has been the silent complicity of foreign governments, business firms and the UN agencies. As a result, few people outside Africa have heard of Equatorial Guinea, and his dictatorship continues almost unchallenged.

The UN not only cooperates with President Macias' government within the original planning period which ends in 1976; it has drawn up a programme of assistance extending until 1981. It is difficult to see how the various projects drawn up at the request of the Macias administration will stand up to the 'disappearance' of local officials who are being constantly removed by the government on charges of 'subversion' and other pretexts. To take but two recent examples: UNDP attempts to promote economic development must be affected by the arrest and probable executions of the Minister of Finance, Mr. Nkoo Ivasa, and the Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Jesus Buendiy. Will the UN and its agencies simply step in to help fill the gap? One must hope that their replacement will be noted, at least, in official UN reports. The UNDP has evaded any involvement in labour questions although those of its experts attached to the agricultural sector can hardly fail to observe that the man power requirements in the plantations are being met by forced labour.

The UNDP advises its staff that 'government authorization is necessary to visit the beaches and other areas of the island, and a fee varying between 150 and 1,500 pesetas is charged for each visit.'<sup>153</sup> This accords with information received from refugees that all people are forbidden to go near the shores of Fernando Po because the authorities wish to prevent 'escapes' to the mainland, and that as a result all fishing on the island has ceased.<sup>154</sup>

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153 UNDP, *Living Conditions*. . . p.20.

154 Interview with Mr. Nchama of ANRD, Geneva, 22.6.1976.

The need for government authorization to visit the beaches must have struck UNDP personnel as having a purpose beyond that of swelling the state coffers with the revenue arising from the special permits. The UNDP's proposed 'high-level adviser on fisheries, [155] might also find the scope of his activities somewhat affected.

The UN and its agencies find it possible in practice to promote economic development in Equatorial Guinea without going against their own principles. It is obvious why the UNDP has been so anxious not to expose any of the more bizarre aspects of life in Equatorial Guinea in its reports: to embarrass governments in need of assistance would not only be unwise but also outside the terms of the Charter as it is generally understood on 'domestic' questions. To irritate Macias would lead to a rupture between the UNDP and his government, and it could be argued that this cannot be in the interest of the population which is badly in need of some improvement in its living standards. But can there be economic improvement under a government like that of Macias; after all, development involves willing cooperation and not compulsion. In the years of activity by the UNDP and other UN agencies the economic situation in Equatorial Guinea has deteriorated and not improved.

But if UN personnel, as international civil servants, are bound not to speak out in criticism of the governments which they serve—a dubious proposition—the same is scarcely true of the foreign aid personnel, the state enterprises and the private firms directly involved. What does the Soviet Union want: fish or strategic bases? Since Angola became the subject of bitter international dispute Fernando Po is more valuable than ever because of its strategic potential, and it seems likely that this consideration explains the Soviet presence as well as America's unwillingness to embarrass Equatorial Guinea by asking awkward questions. This is probably also one of the main reasons behind France's rapidly increasing involvement in Equatorial Guinea. The natural resources at stake, including perhaps uranium, may be considerable, but to be profitably exploited they require a willing labour force. Yet normalization of Equatorial Guinea's internal affairs would require the withdrawal of all external assistance to the regime to enable the people in the country to act effectively against the dictatorship. But to facilitate such a development could lead to a resurgence of nationalism hostile to foreign interests—East or West. This is why aid and other cooperation have continued regardless of their ultimately tragic effects. And if economic cooperation and international aid have helped to keep Macias in power, the most important factor in his ascendancy has been the protective wall of silence around his bloody regime.





The **Anti-Slavery Society** was formed in 1839. Its aim is to eradicate slavery in all forms, and to defend human rights in accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council. It is registered as a charity in the UK. It is supported entirely by voluntary contributions from its members and by grants from charitable foundations.

The Anti-Slavery Society acts

- by carrying out research into contemporary slavery (defined in the 1956 International Convention as chattel slavery, debt bondage, serfdom, exploitation of children and servile forms of marriage), and publishing the results
- by direct contacts with governments where evidence exists of human rights abuses related to slavery
- by lobbying at the United Nations for increased international responsibility in human rights matters.

The **Committee for Indigenous Peoples** is an integral part of the Anti-Slavery Society and is successor to the Aborigines Protection Society, founded in 1837, and merged with the Anti-Slavery Society in 1909.

The Committee for Indigenous Peoples exists to help indigenous, traditional peoples to define and protect their interests within the context of change and development, to extend international responsibility and action in regard to such peoples, and to publicise their situation.

The Committee acts

- by research on problems affecting indigenous peoples and on new approaches to development in traditional societies
- by organising meetings of academic specialists, government officials, aid agency personnel and the indigenous peoples themselves, to explore common problems
- by stimulating and finding finance for development projects in traditional communities
- by pressing at the UN and other international organisations for greater use of existing international and national legislation protecting the rights of such peoples.

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